

Would you like to share their present life in the land of begin again?

TIME and again since I returned from Australia people thinking of emigrating have asked me: "What are things REALLY like in migrants' hostels over there?"

No wonder they are bewildered. They have heard or read reports about riots, bad food and awful living conditions. Then the Australian authorities deny these stories. What are these people to believe?

Well, I have no axe to grind in the matter. I spent more than two years in hostels only because my husband was managing them.

And the first thing I want to say is this. From what I was told by many who HAVE gone to Australia, much of the bitterness and discontent among migrants has its origin in England—at Australia House in London.

Tens of thousands of Britons have poured into Australia with, apparently, a completely false impression of what to expect.

Instead of being told they will have to "rough it" in the equivalent to squatters' camps, they seem to have been given over-painted, glamourised pictures of hostel life by the people in London.

As one mother from Birmingham put it, "If they'd told us it would be like this we would never have come. I suppose we must make the best of it, but it's hard on the kiddies. And I'll never forgive them at Australia House."

But not every migrant has the courage of the lady from Birmingham. Some are not prepared

to "make the best of it," but moan and groan, oozing self-pity and earning reputations as professional trouble-makers.

"These people were failures at home and they will be failures out here," one Australian told me. "If they could have held down decent jobs in England they would never have wanted to come here."

If that is so, Australia House should not have accepted these people as migrants.

But judge for yourself whether you could stand life in a migrants' hostel. Let me give you an idea of what they are really like.

To start off with, the choice of sites for these hostels—they are really camps—is often, to put it mildly, unfortunate.

Ours, at Geelong, was opposite a motor factory on the main Melbourne road. Two children were killed by traffic while going to school.

The hostel at Williamstown was built on an old racecourse not far from an oil refinery. The factory's sewage creek ran right

### AUSTRALIA HOUSE REPLIES

WE invited the Australian authorities to comment on Mrs. Wood's article. This is what they said:

"Mrs. Wood's statement that migrants were given overpainted, glamourised pictures of hostel life is not correct. When our plans to build special hostels for British migrants were held up to meet urgent defence needs, every migrant chosen under the hostels scheme was issued with an official booklet.

"This clearly stated that accommodation would be provided

# A TIN HUT IN THE MUD BUT—

● This article is the first completely frank and impartial account of what awaits British emigrants

to Australia like the family on the right. It is written by MRS. PATRICIA WOOD, whose husband is a manager of migrant hostels in Victoria. Mrs. Wood has lived in the hostels, where tin huts are the main form of accommodation and living conditions are rough. But, she says, there are compensations.



through the camp. Bridges were built spanning the creek, but the stench—especially in summer—was absolutely revolting.

And the roads in both these places were mud tracks when it rained and miniature dust bowls when it was dry.

You will live in half a Nissen hut, divided from your neighbours by no more than a sheet of thin hardboard, or in a steel and fabric hut, sub-divided into flats. Every flat is divided into two bedrooms and a sitting-room, each room measuring no more than 14 ft. by 10 ft.

The earthen floor is covered with felt and the heating in the huts comes from paraffin stoves. Needless to say they are cold and draughty in winter.

If you want an evening bath you will queue for an average of half an hour at the communal bathroom.

You will also queue for an average of half an hour at the communal dining-room at meal times.

But the food, once you get it, is good and wholesome. I know the meaning of rationing both during the war and since my return, and those who complain

about hostel food are downright ungrateful!

There are nurseries for the babies, recreation huts and an adequate laundry service. Special meals are laid on for people working late, and there is a large staff to wait on you.

But there will be little peace and quiet in your hut at night, as you sit squeezed in your tiny drawing-room with the children noisily playing around your feet, trying to listen to the radio. The scene is familiar enough in most homes. But in your hostel hut you will have to cope with precisely the same sort of noises from your neighbours on the other side of a wood partition!

Do not think, however, that my two hostels were the worst in Australia.

The hostels at Brooklyn, Fisherman's Bend and Holmsglen are in the heart of smoky, industrial areas. And I was told that at Brooklyn, which is devoid of windows, electric lights burn day and night.

One of the greatest examples of human folly must surely have been the building of Belmont Hostel, not far from Geelong. It was known that Belmont flooded with every winter's rain, and sure enough when the hostel

was built—to be occupied by Displaced Persons—the huts were regularly flooded out as the water rose a foot high.

One night there was a really terrible flood and the water rose to a height of nine feet. The DPs were evacuated and brought to Geelong.

We did what we could for them, providing food, and most of the British migrants allowed them to sleep on the floors of their huts.

And then, as if we did not have enough troubles on our hands with weeping women, terrified children and ill-tempered men, a so-called "deputation" of our own migrants came to see my husband and myself.

These were people who had refused to provide shelter for the flood victims—the professional trouble-makers among the migrants. To my disgust and shame as an Englishwoman they started to rant and rave against

"the dirty stinking foreigners littering the place."

Needless to say, my husband soon sent these trouble-makers packing!

There is one good item on the credit side of these hostels—the charge for accommodation is quite reasonable. For full board, a man pays £4 7s. 6d.; a woman £2 18s.; a child aged 5-10, £1 11s. 6d.; a child aged 10-15, £1 17s.—not a lot considering you should be earning more than £12 a week.

I have given you an honest, impartial picture of a migrants' camp in Australia today. They have their good points—and their bad points.

From the thousands of migrants I have known and spoken to, I have come to this conclusion: Forget any pretty pictures you may have of life in a migrants' hostel. Expect the very worst and you won't be disappointed. Indeed, you may be pleasantly surprised!

74 Newspaper cutting from an unknown publication; a more legible 'transcription' can be found overleaf.

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"This clearly stated that accommodation would be provided in converted store buildings, former

service buildings and sub-divided Nissen huts. Such a description would surely not stimulate thoughts of a 'dream home.'

"Mrs. Wood comments on the occasional British misfit accepted by the Migration Department. A percentage of failures is inevitable in so vast a human movement as Australia's post-war immigration drive, but what really matters is that the overwhelming majority of the 350,000 British migrants who have gone out since the war have made a success of their new lives."

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